DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 318 602 RC 017 510

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TITLE Forming Practice & Academic Partnerships in Recruitment of Hispanic Students for the Field of Aging.
PUB DATE Oct 89
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Association of Social Workers (San Francisco, CA, October 14, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Gerontology; Field Experience Programs; Gerontology; *Hispanic Americans; Internship Programs; *Older Adults; Postsecondary Education; Social Workers; *Student Recruitment; Summer Programs

ABSTRACT

The Hispanic elderly population shares a common language and similar belief systems, although the population is comprised of subgroups of various national origins. Hispanic elderly are a rapidly growing proportion of the total Hispanic population, and are also among the most economically, physically, and emotionally vulnerable populations. This paper describes a recruitment program to identify Hispanic college students interested in pursuing a career of service to Hispanic elderly. Four partnerships were established with universities located in regions with high concentrations of Hispanic elderly. The paper describes the 10-week summer internship, a major component of the year-long training program. Students were placed with selected national agencies located in Washington, D.C., such as the U.S. Congress House Select Committee on Aging or the National Hispanic Council on Aging. Goals of the summer internship were to increase students' general knowledge of and interest in gerontology careers. Student interns provided auxiliary staff personnel for selected agencies, increased agencies' awareness of Hispanic elderly needs, and offered opportunities for agencies to interact with each other. The paper describes orientation, placement activities, seminars, student program evaluations, and program implementation. There was consensus among participants and supervisors that such a program should be continued. (DHP)

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ED318602

FORMING PRACTICE & ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS IN RECRUITMENT OF HISPANIC STUDENTS FOR THE FIELD OF AGING

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Paper presented at the National Association of Social Workers 1989 Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA., October 14, 1989.

RC017510

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FORMING PRACTICE & ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS IN RECRUITMENT OF HISPANIC STUDENTS FOR THE FIELD OF AGING

The Hispanic elderly populations share a common language and similar belief systems. The Hispanic population is composed of various subgroups. The U. S. Bureau of the Census identifies six subgroups: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American and other Spanish/Hispanic origin. The other category is usually used to designate Hispanics in areas like New Mexico or Colorado that self identify as Spanish because of ancestral roots originating in Spain. AARP (1989) reports that nearly 673,000 (about 5%) of the Hispanic population are 65 years of age or over, and of those almost 45,000 (6.6) are 85 or older. The Bureau of Census Projections of the Hispanic Population: 1983-2080 (1986) report indicates increases in the number of Hispanic elderly will account for one-quarter of the total population growth over the next twenty years. Since 1970, the Hispanic elderly population has grown by sixty-one percent. The Hispanic elderly are not only a rapidly growing proportion of the total Hispanic population, but are also among the most economically, physically, and emotionally vulnerable populations (Cubillos, 1987). Hispanics are the least educated elderly subgroup. The median number of school years completed for Hispanics 65 years and older in 1987 was 7.4, one third (34.6%) had less than five

years of formal schooling (Cubillos, 1987). In 1985, nearly one in four Hispanics 75 and over (24.4) had no formal schooling. This suggests that English proficiency is limited and would therefore require careproviders who are Spanish and English proficient. Spanish is required to facilitate direct services to the client and English to facilitate connecting the client with external resources.

This need prompted the National Hispanic Council on Aging to seek funding through the Administration on Aging for purposes of identifying Hispanic college students who expressed an interest in pursuing a career of service to Hispanic elderly. The agency established partnerships with three major universities that had accredited social work programs with faculty that had an interest in both gerontology and the preparation of professionals to serve Hispanic elderly. Four partnerships were established with universities located in regions with a high concentration of both Hispanic elderly and Hispanic students. Individual faculty from each institution were identified to serve in the dual role of student mentor and liaison with the national agency staff.

Twelve students, three from each university, participated in the initial program year. Students were competitively selected in each university. Faculty teams screened applicants and selected those who met the academic criteria (GPA 3.0) and demonstrated leadership potential plus presented evidence of previous efforts

or interest in working with an elderly population. The components of the program were made known to the students in the applicant recruitment materials. Each student if selected had to agree to participate in a ten week supervised internship with a national agency located in Washington, D. C. The selected national agency placements were programs of a non-direct service nature whose focus was on advocacy to promote national and local policy changes on a variety of social problems that impact lives of the elderly. For example, four students were placed with the U. S. Congress House Select Committee on Aging.

Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is to describe how this recruitment model was operationalized. It is hoped that this model can be replicated to target recruitment efforts with other minority or special population groups or with students in general where a particular field of practice seeks to generate increased interest for marketing its program to generate more applicants.

The major focus of this paper will be on the description of the ten week summer internship which was the major component of four parts to a one year training program which is the subject of this paper.. The three other components were designed to increase knowledge and exposure to the mission and activities of the National Hispanic Council on Aging. The principle activities which were carried out in the students' respective communities were supervised by the student's university mentor. These activities included: 1) monthly presence and sharing with local

chapter members accounts of summer and other activities that have relevance for local chapters; 2) the preparation of a professional paper that demonstrated the students' identification of a social problem affecting the elderly and how this was assessed and addressed in her/his summer agency placement. This, of course, included the student's ability to show how this social problem was a significant issue for Hispanic elderly. The culmination of this effort was the honor of making a formal national presentation at the Annual membership meeting of the National Hispanic Council on Aging which is attended by both lay and professional members. The third component consisted of a requirement that the student attend and participate in a minimum of two leadership training conferences sponsored by the National Hispanic Council on Aging.

Program Goals:

Four major goals guided the activities of the program which constituted the ten week summer intern program. Three of these activities addressed student needs and three addressed placement agency benefits. The goals with a focus on student needs included: 1) increasing the students general knowledge of the field of gerontology by exposing them to program activities, professional role models and working conditions in agencies that advocate for the elderly; 2) increasing the students expressed interest and commitment to pursue a career in the field of gerontology and 3) increasing career choice options by providing students with opportunities to observe different practice

settings and practitioners representative of a variety of disciplines who practice in the field of aging.

Placement Agency Benefits:

The agency benefits addressed in the fourth goal are three fold. One, the student interns provided auxiliary personnel at minimal cost. The agency investment was primarily in the form of staff time to coordinate and supervise student assignments. There was also a cost in terms of space. Two, the presence of the students in agencies where the needs of Hispanic elderly had not been given special consideration, did enable agency staffs' to gain a new appreciation for consumer language barriers and the value of incorporating a bilingual/bicultural perspective in the administration of their programs. In one agency the students were instrumental in reestablishing agency ties with an affiliate agency in Puerto Rico that had not responded to earlier communications because of staff language barriers. And finally, the project afforded the student placement agencies new opportunities to interact with each other and the staff of the National Hispanic Council on Aging to facil ate mutual exchanges that were beneficial to all parties in promoting recruitment of future professionals to the field of gerontology.

Components of Summer Intern Program:

To facilitate description of the ten week summer internship program the paper will describe the components of the program for the summer and describe the implementation process separately. The program itself consisted of the following five parts: 1)

orientation; 2) agency supervised placement; 3) weekly half day seminars which included meetings with experts and tours of other national advocacy programs for the elderly; 4) weekly ninety minute seminars to provide students an opportunity to share agency placement experiences and assigned readings and 5) evaluation which included administration of a pre-and-post test instrument designed to measure change in relation to the goals of the project.

Orientation:

The orientation included information to familiarize students with the sponsoring agency, its mission, history, organizational structure, and background leading to the development of the intern program. The goals of the program and roles of the various professionals that would be interacting with them were explained. An outgoing intern with the House Select Committee on Aging shared with the group her personal experiences living in Washington as a single woman and her experiences in her role as intern. She gave them a list of do's and don'ts. Information on housing, rules and regulations at the university campus where students were housed was provided. City and metro transportation maps were issued and tours of the metro area were arranged. As part of orientation students were administered a pre-test to provide baseline data in relationship to the program goals. Arrangements were made for students to meet prospective supervisors informally at a reception arranged at the end of the first day. The second day of orientation included prearranged

mutual supervisee-supervisor screening interviews which usually culminated in a mutual agreement for placement.

Placement Activities:

All students were placed in agencies before the end of the first week. With one exception, all students shared placements with one or more other students. Two large agencies accepted four and five students. Within the large agencies students were assigned to individual supervisors. The focus of the internship was primarily to expose the student to the activities that were associated with caring out the mission of the respective agency. Most students learned skills such as case finding, conducting library searches, answering phone inquiries, doing phone surveys, preparing reports and one student was responsible for bringing together experts and assuming a major role in a Congressional hearing sponsored by the Select Committee on Aging. Most of these interns learned how to use word processors which in itself is an important skill. Students spend a minimum of thirty-two clock hours on site, the four students placed with the House Select Committee on Aging vorked longer hours, but did not complain. It was not uncommon for these students to stay overtime and put it a 50 clock hour week. Supervisors were asked to identify expected learning tasks similar to a teaching learning agreement. A similar instruments was required to assess the students performance and learning needs at the end of the ten week period. In addition the director and program coordinator met with

supervisors and agency staff who interacted with the students to solicit suggestions to improve the program.

Seminar Activities:

The half-day seminars were planned so that part of the seminar was didactic which included contact with an expert who addressed some aspect of work with the elderly. The second part usually involved an orientation and agency tour of a national agency that shared the general goals of improving services for the elderly. Each agency orientation was pre-arranged so that the host agency was familiar with the goals of the project and therefore the staff was able to include information on how the particular agency was addressing the needs of Hispanic elderly.

The ninety minute seminars were conducted on campus where the students were housed. This activity was schedule one evening a week. The purpose of this activity was to familiarize students with the literature in this field and to provide them an opportunity to learn from each other as they shared both readings and agency experiences.

Evaluation:

The fifth part of the program was the evaluation mentioned earlier as a component of the initial orientation where participants were administered a pre-test. At the end of the ten week experience students were administered the post-test. Two parts of the instrument addressed levels of general knowledge and commitment to pursue a career in gerontology. These parts were alike in the pre-and post-test. A third part was added in the

post-test to provide feedback on the participants' evaluation of the didactic sessions and orientation tours.

Process of Implementation:

In terms of process the author was the program coordinator who was responsible for operationalizing the components described above. The NHCOA staff circulated announcements and criteria for the applicants for this program. The applicants were screened by a faculty committee in each respective institution. Each institution selected three participants. The students credentials were sent to the national office for processing and to provide information for planning. The project coordinator visited potential placements sites and met with key staff who had expressed an interest in the program. Because the credential materials had in most cases very limited information to facilitate placement planning, it was decided that placements would not be finalized until supervisors and supervisees had an opportunity to meet and share expectations.

As indicated above, the orientation was pre-planned, we tried to anticipate what kinds of questions and needs the students might have given this new experience for all parties. Incidently, the Administration on Aging grant awarded to the agency, did provide funds to support the students travel to and from Washington, D. C., housing costs and a weekly food and transportation allowance. It also provided funds for staff support.

The internship structural arrangements were similar to a social work type field placement arrangement. The coordinator did make periodic contacts by phone and person (two visits) to review the kinds of assignments and identify needs of the student and supervisor. The coordinator had extensive experience in doing agency liaison activities and conducting field practicum supervision. Unlike the field practicum, the internship focus was not on learning specific practice skills but on expanding the student's awareness of the dimensions of the field which includes identification of relevant issues, career and program options, and beginning awareness of how needs of Hispanic elderly are being or not being addressed.

Again, as suggested above both the half-day and ninety minute seminars were pre-planned so that the student knew from day one the topic of each of the ten scheduled seminars. In addition to the seminars, further exposure to formal learning experiences was provided by having the students attend three national conferences where the themes addressed current issues affecting minority populations and research findings on health care needs and innovative approaches to services for the elderly.

Findings:

The evaluation results indicate that the goals of the project were realized. The scores increased in the direction of increased participant knowledge and commitment to pursue a career in gerontology. The supervisors gave high praise for the interns' performance. The seminars with didactic content and orientation

tours were rated high. There was consensus among the participants and supervisors that this kind of program needs to be continued.

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